

The Season

By Nathan Maynard



Education Resource

“But what if you lose your pilot bird? Then how do you find your way? How do you keep flying if you lose a wing?”

About This Resource

This resource has been created to accompany the 2018 national tour of Tasmania Performs production of *The Season*. The production is suitable for students and young people in Years 9 to 12. Included in this resource is a range of activities that explore the production through the lenses of Drama/Theatre Studies, English/Literacy, History, Critical and Creative Thinking, Ethics, Science/Environmental Studies, and the cross curricular priorities of Indigenous cultures and sustainability. You will also notice there are **quotations** from the script of the play included to introduce characters and moments, and to later remind you of these moments when you are discussing and exploring the play further. Activities are marked with mutton bird feathers >>



With regard to the curriculum, more detailed references to the Australian Curriculum can be found in the table located at the end of this resource. The activities and tasks have been designed to be adapted for different ages and skill levels, to challenge, to provoke, and to enrich students' and teachers' experience of seeing the production. Further, senior secondary students of Drama, Theatre, Environmental Science, Australian History and Indigenous Studies will find there are many activities that will relate to their studies.

Why Theatre?

Nathan Maynard has chosen to use theatre as the medium for story-telling and for drawing our attention to his family and his people's history and traditions. He could have written an article, a book, a graphic novel, made a film or a-generated a YouTube channel – all these media could contain and project their ideas. However, in the end, he chose to write a play. The word theatre derives from the Greek “the seeing place” or “to behold” (*theasthai*). In Greek theatre, it was the place where people came together to see the truth about life and society. American theatre actor, Willem Dafoe, stated that “Great theatre is about challenging how we think and encouraging us to fantasize about a world we aspire to”. It is worth considering this statement when you are preparing to see or after you have seen the production.

In the theatre you are part of a live audience watching live performers in real time. Both audience and performers can see and hear each other, the story can only go forward. It cannot go backwards, or be paused or repeated. In a way you are held captive within the play's time. Theatre is *unique* in this regard. The liveness of being in the theatre makes it a far more powerful (and risky) experience than other media. You may have felt this yourself if you have acted in plays or musicals. This risk and the liveness is often why writers choose theatre as a medium through which to explore their ideas.



DISCUSS (Critical And Creative Thinking)

- What theatre experiences have you already had?
- Have you seen a play or a musical?
- Have you performed on stage?
- What do you recall about these that possibly made you feel excited, nervous, curious etc?
- What is different about seeing a play from watching a film or something on television or Youtube?

Clay: Hey pop, what's the go with the white bird?

Ben: It's the spirit bird, the pilot bird, the bird that guides them on their migration all way up to Alaska and past Japan, down to New Zealand and back home again. It connects **us** with those traditional mobs. If you catch it, you'll get luck but if you kill it...

The Creative Team

Writer Nathan Maynard

Director Isaac Drandic

Dramaturg Peter Matheson

Set and Costume Designer Richard Roberts

Lighting Designer Rachel Burke

Sound Designer Ben Grant

Cast Luke Carroll, Nazaree Dickerson, Trevor Jamieson, Lisa Maza, Della Rae Morrison, Maitland Schnaars & James Slee

Production Photographer Robert Catto

About The Company

Tasmania Performs is present at every level of the Tasmanian performing arts sector. Tasmania Performs works with performing artists at critical points across their careers, providing targeted support and professional opportunities through producing and/or touring work.

About The Show

The Season is a warm and laugh-out-loud comedy about an Aboriginal family who come together each year for the traditional Mutton Bird harvest on Tasmania's Dog Island. It is a time for the family to come together, to catch up, to reminisce and to look forward together. But as with any family, tension is simmering just below the surface, and can bubble over with both heartbreaking and hilarious results.

The show is big-hearted, accessible, upfront and honest, providing a fascinating glimpse into a little-known tradition. More importantly, it joyously celebrates a thriving culture that continues to grow and strengthen despite several centuries of colonization.

About The Writer

Nathan is a descendant of the chief of the Trawlwoolway Clan and of the North East Tasmanian Indigenous peoples. He has two decades experience as a dancer in schools and communities, and has worked with such nationally recognized companies as Terrapin Puppet Theatre and the Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra. Nathan was the 2006 and 2013 recipient of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Artist of the Year Award, and has been nominated for the 2017 Tasmanian Aboriginal Artist of the Year and Tasmanian Aboriginal of the Year Awards.

Nathan comes from a long-line of mutton-birders, and *The Season* is largely based on his personal experiences. The play was developed by Tasmania Performs and showcased in the 2015 Yellamundie Festival, before securing Major Festivals Initiative support to premiere at Sydney Festival before seasons at Ten Days on The Island and Melbourne Festival in 2017.



Discuss (Drama)

Consider the above list of personnel who created and produced and perform in *The Season*.

- In contemporary theatre practice more traditional roles of writer, director, and performer tend to become blurred – do you agree?
- What is the role of a director in the theatre?
- Peter Matheson is named as “dramaturg”. What is a dramaturg?
- What is the role of design in theatre?
- How would each of the designers work to ensure their area of design complemented the other areas?
- How does a director cast a play? Does a writer write a character for a particular actor?



Before You See The Play...

This section of the Education Resource aims to get you thinking about the play and the ideas and themes it explores. For instance, what do you know about:

- The Bass Strait Islands
- The history of Tasmanian Aboriginal people
- Songlines
- Mutton Birding
- Shell necklace making
- Writing, producing and directing a play?

These and other aspects of *The Season* are explored in the following section of this resource and there are links to some wonderful resources. It's good to have a sense of the play before you see it. You may only have one opportunity so being prepared can make for a more enjoyable and engaging experience.

Writer's Note - Nathan Maynard

My name is Nathan Maynard, my father is Darrell Maynard and my grandparents were Benjamin Tasman Maynard and Stella Mansell, who were born on Cape Barren and Flinders islands in Bass Strait.

My family belongs to a community known as the mutton-bird people. We harvest the mutton-birds nest on the Bass Strait islands. It's a cultural practice we call 'the birding', and every year we go birding for "the Season".

I come from a proud birding family. We've harvested mutton birds every year since the beginning of time. Before I laid my eyes on Big Dog Island, I had already seen it a thousand times in my head. I knew what it

looked like and felt like from all the yarns I had been told from my father, grandparents, uncles, aunts and the cousins. I knew to expect the strong smell of the birds, smashing my nostrils when I first jumped off the tinny and onto the Island.

I knew to expect past birders' names carved and written on the walls of the cookhouse shed. I knew what to expect when I first thrust my arm down a dark mutton-bird's nesting hole, on a snake- and spider-infested Island. All those yarns were the first part of my journey. My Initiation finished when I first pulled a bird out of that hole and my training had begun.

20 years on, Big Dog Island may be my physical home during the Season, but it's forever my spiritual home. There is no other place that I feel so strongly connected to my land,



Image by James Henry

culture, history, people... my old people ... I feel them with me. When I'm birding, I know that's exactly where I'm meant to be, amongst my people and the birds. Birds that we are eternally grateful for and hold in our hearts so dearly.

The Mutton Bird takes the longest migration of any animal in the world ... past New Zealand, Japan and up to Alaska and back home to our islands to breed in the same burrow every year ... a migration of 30,000 kilometres. They are simply amazing and resilient as hell. Just like the people they are forever connected to.

The parallels between the birds and us mob don't stop there. Many of us migrate back to the same shed year after year. Many find our life-long partners on the island ... many are conceived or conceive on the island ... or at least get some practice in. We grow up on the island and lose our baby feathers...and like the birds, our yearly journey starts and finishes on the island. Also see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_3no1qYohDk



Discuss (Literacy)

In his description of mutton birding on the island, what insights do you gain into the writer's life?

Why do you think he felt compelled to write this story into a play to be performed?

In the final paragraph, Nathan Maynard draws parallels between his and his family's life and that of the migration of the Mutton Bird.

Discuss the metaphors and imagery in his description.

Director's Note - Isaac Drandic

[Note: the italics are intended to draw your attention to particular points]

This is a stage play with a cast of seven Aboriginal actors playing eight characters. *It's set in the present day and tells the story of a Tasmanian Family and their five weeks on an isolated island in the Bass Strait harvesting Mutton Birds, a traditional cultural practice.*

It's a comedy, with universal themes around family, culture, tradition and change. The modern world is starting to encroach on their previously private domain. It's a fictional yarn, seeded in the truth of Nathan's experiences across twenty years of Mutton Bird seasons, and the hundreds of yarns (some tall, some true) that he has inherited from his community.

Like many of us, I grew up thinking Trukanini was the last Aboriginal Tasmanian. When I saw Nathan's Play read at the National Yellamundie Festival, *I realised how badly misinformed many of us have been via the European view of history, and how little we knew about this community.* This work is important because we get a first-hand insight

into this world we haven't had access to. Elder Uncle Jimmy Everett and the community are supporting Nathan to be one of their story tellers.

Rewriting, reframing and reclaiming the image of ourselves and telling our own stories is the top priority to better the health outcomes of our communities.

We need stories of thriving, resilient and successful families to inspire our young. We need Aboriginal creatives to control the stage and to paint an accurate picture of ourselves to inspire and celebrate who we are.



Image by James Henry

It's been 30 years since Jimmy Everett penned his plays that were only ever presented in Tasmania back in the 80's. This will be the first play to touch on the history of their traditional practices and bring these to the national stage. Nathan's writing style manages to capture our imagination and challenge our pre-conceptions of Tasmanian Aboriginal people.

The work is understated, there isn't a clap stick in sight but the depth of tradition and respect is evident through the action of the play. *It's not romanticised, it's real. The plain speak style of the script* is part of its charm and is quite disarming. This style of play has been missing from our mainstages. *It's simple, unpretentious, honest* and your audiences are going to love it.

I feel comfortable directing this Tasmanian Story because contemporary Aboriginals are keen to collaborate and to work across borders to share our skills, knowledge and traditions to strengthen all of us. This is one of the all too rare projects that has an Aboriginal writer and director as well as an Aboriginal cast of seven. *A unique Aboriginal story* and a unique opportunity to be part of this. It's meaningful. Because of the significance of this work we are bringing together some of the best Indigenous artists from around the country.



Discuss (Drama)

In his notes director Isaac Drandic comments on the following aspects of theatre:

Characters, Style, Setting, Language, Structure, Purpose/Intention.

In the theatre these areas contribute to creating the 'World of the Play', or the world created on stage. Use the text in italics to consider how the director helps you to gain a sense of the World of the Play

WHAT DOES A DIRECTOR DO? This is an important question and it's an important role!

Characters

Ben Duncan	-	Aged 60, father of Lou and grandfather of Clay
Stella Duncan	-	Aged 58, mother of Lou and grandmother of Clay
Aunty Marlene	-	Aged 62, Stella's sister and "auntie" to Lou
Lou Duncan	-	Aged 35, Ben and Stella's daughter and mother to Clay
Clay Duncan	-	Aged 16, Lou's son, first time on the Island for the season
Ritchie Duncan	-	Aged 30, Ben and Stella's son, brother to Lou
Neil Watson	-	Aged 60, Ben's opposition in mutton birding, Marlene's lover
Richard Hadgemen	-	Senior Ranger and Wildlife Office on the island



Discuss (Critical Thinking, Drama, Literacy)

Characters in a play are often named specifically and their ages and relationships are important.

What do the names and relationships of the characters in this play – as listed above – tell you?

How do the characters' names suggest a particular style of theatre? Do they seem realistic?

How do the brief descriptions of the characters offer insight into how these characters may interact?

How many generations are represented here?

How does this family compare to your family? Is it similar? Is it different?

Structure – 25 Scenes

The play is presented across a period of a few weeks, across several locations, using a number of scenes. The titles of the scenes are:

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| - The Night before | - Saturday night! |
| - Arriving | - Oil of Olay (Squeezing) |
| - First morning (In the Cookhouse) | - Dicky fires off a warning shot |
| - Wonder what the poor people are doing? | - I can't fly no more |
| - Grandfather and grandson time (Rookery) | - Vibrators and sparkling birds |
| - Cousin Dick comes to say g'day (Rookery) | - Morning time at the Duncan shed |
| - This is school (outside the shed) | - The old Sealer and the Boy |
| - The old snake trick (outside the shed) | - Family time |
| - This is school...cont. | - Clean the shit out of your ears |
| - The old snake trick...cont. | - I can do this |
| - Get ya Duncan on (Cookhouse) | - The gin and the truth |
| | - Dad's coming! |
| | - What are you doing here? |
| | - The journey starts (Rookery) |



Interpreting Scene Titles (Drama)

Read through the list of titles of scenes from the play – what do they suggest?

Have someone write the titles of each scene on separate pieces of paper and place in a container

Work in pairs or in small groups of 3-5 and select one of the scene titles from the container

Discuss the title and what it could be about. What does it mean to you and your group? What does it mean in terms of the title of the play – *The Season*?

Now draw on what you already know about the play from exploring this resource – characters, setting, content and purpose for the next bit!

In your pairs or small groups - create a tableau or a series of 3 tableaux that represent your understanding of the scene title – you get to be imaginative here and it is all about interpretation.

After you have decided on your one tableau or your set of three present your interpretation to the rest of the class/group

EXTENSION or variation on this could be the same scene being explored by more than one group in order to compare and contrast interpretations of the scene title – different interpretations are important.

AFTER seeing the play consider how your initial interpretation compared to the scene you saw.

Island slang

In the play the characters use certain slang words, for instance:

Highland = island

Sanks = thanks

Sing = thing

Jonnie Cake = damper

Mutton fish = abalone

Nipiwook! = get going



Research (Literacy)

What is SLANG? How do local words develop?

In pairs or as individuals conduct some research about the origins of the term “slang”.

Make a list of ten words you consider to be slang and their equivalent ‘proper’ term.

Share your work with the rest of the group – maybe compile a class slang dictionary.

It’s also interesting to consider slang in different languages and cultures

Different members of your class/group might have difference slang words in their own language – share these with each other and add to your dictionary.

What does slang, as a phenomenon of the development of language, tell us about culture and identity?

Background Information

Remember some of the questions asked at the beginning about what you might know about certain topics? This section of the resource aims to propel you towards knowing more about, researching, discussing and preparing yourself to see the production of *The Season*. The information highlights some of the environmental, historical, and cultural themes that you will encounter in the performance.

Bass Strait Islands – The Furneaux/tayaritja Group

The Furneaux Group is a group of approximately 100 islands located at the eastern end of Bass Strait, between Victoria and Tasmania, Australia. The Indigenous name for the islands in the Bass Strait is *tayaritja*, and these islands were part of the lives of Indigenous people for thousands of years before white settlement. In western history, the Furneaux Group were named after British navigator Tobias Furneaux who sighted the eastern side of these islands after leaving Adventure Bay in 1773 on his way to New Zealand to re-join Captain James Cook. British navigator Matthew Flinders was the first Westerner to explore the Furneaux Islands group in the *Francis* in 1798. The largest islands in the group are Flinders Island, Cape Barren Island, and Clarke Island. The group contains five settlements: Killiecrankie, Emita, Lady Barron, Cape Barren Island, and Whitemark on Flinders Island, which serves as the administrative centre of the Flinders Council.

From 1803 onward, Tasmanian Aboriginal people experienced considerable harassment from white settlers. In 1830, Governor Arthur, aided by George Augustus Robinson, exiled surviving Tasmanian Aborigines to the Furneaux Islands. Several settlement sites were tried before Wybalenna on Flinders Island, was chosen in 1833, and given the name “Blackman’s Houses”. This settlement was far from successful, though. Of the 200 or so Tasmanian Aborigines who were exiled to Wybalenna, all but 47 died and were buried in the Wybalenna cemetery.

In 1847, the settlement was closed and those who remained were transported to Oyster Cove on the Tasmanian mainland, where, one-by-one, they also died – a tragic and avoidable outcome of white settlement. In *The Season*, the island we are taken to is Big Dog Island or Great Dog Island, part of the Furneaux group in Bass Strait.

Source: <https://www.flinders.tas.gov.au/furneaux-history>

Further reading:

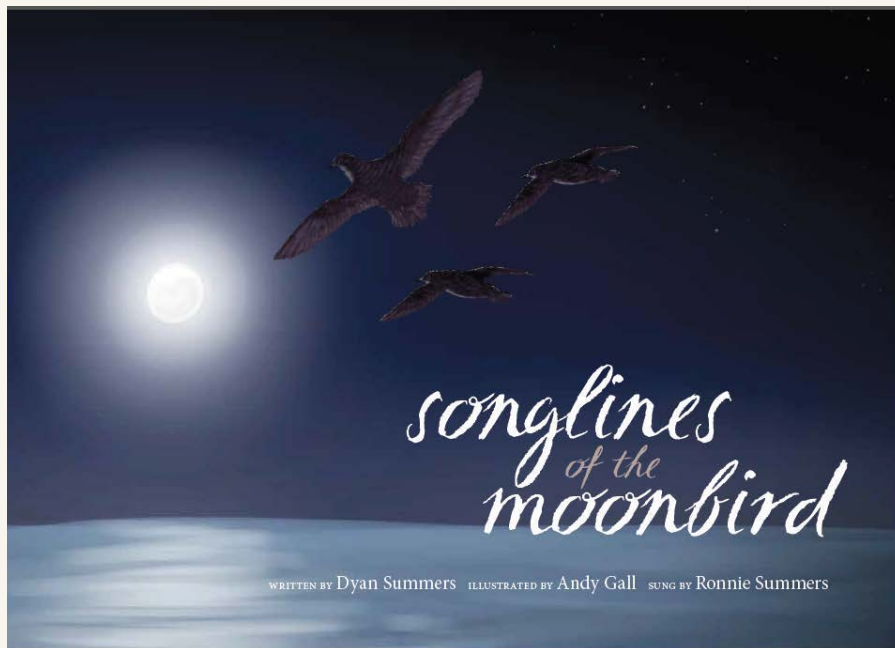
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_islands_of_Tasmania

http://www.utas.edu.au/library/companion_to_tasmanian_history/F/Furneaux%20Group.htm

Songlines And Mutton Birding

*"When the moon fell away from the face of earth
it left the moonbird behind
I want to sing the song of the moonbird to you
So your family will sing you back home....."*

[Extract from Songlines of the Moon Bird Learning Resource]



FROM: <https://youtu.be/tAugRUk43qc>

What Is A Songline?

Songlines include important information about creation and naming of natural features within the landscape. They identify landmarks and directions across travel and trade routes and ceremonial places. In English, Songlines are also described as codes, or dreaming tracks memorised and sung in a specific order. By singing the songs in the right order, Aborigines always know where they are. Songlines also include dance.

Before invasion, Songlines linked significant places and geographical features across the whole area of the continent. Songlines include important information about relationships between all things within the environment, (land, sea, sky) and associated management responsibilities.

A Songline can be related to a specific place within one country, or it could traverse for many miles across many countries, and subsequently be sung in many languages. While travelling through the territory of another tribe, that section of the Songline has to be sung in the language of that tribe.

More information: artistwd.com/joyzine/australia/abr_culture/songlines.php



DISCUSS (Literacy And Critical Thinking)

Consider the information and images that are presented by Songlines of the Moonbird, the YouTube clip and the description. Now consider the metaphors the playwright, Nathan Maynard, creates by comparing the Mutton Bird migration (Moon Bird) and his people.

- What discoveries does all this information offer you about re the significance of Songlines for Australia's Indigenous people?
- Why do you think the Mutton Bird is also called the Moon Bird?

What Is Mutton Birding?

The mutton bird, moon bird or Shearwater

The mutton bird may not be spectacular in appearance, but it has some remarkable characteristics, including annual migration around the Pacific Ocean, and an uncannily regular lifecycle. Each year the bulk of the colony (the breeding age birds) return to the nesting grounds on almost the same day. Individuals return to the same nest burrow they occupied the previous year and generally mate with the same partner throughout their breeding life.

[**Note:** In the play, the character of Ben Duncan talks about an important bird, Henrietta, not returning this season and he is upset. What might this tell you about his knowledge of the birds and of the season?]

For a few weeks after returning to the colony, the birds remain busy scratching (digging) or clearing out nest burrows. The burrows are tunnels about one metre long dug in soft soil or sand close to the surface (This results in nests being difficult to avoid and easily crushed by walkers). Mating occurs in early November, with the entire population then flying off to sea for about two weeks. Eggs are laid immediately upon return. Each pair has one white oval egg similar in size to a domestic hen egg.

The male and female birds share the duty of incubation, with the male spending the first 12 to 14 days on the egg, followed by the female for 10 to 13 days. This alternating duty continues until the egg hatches about mid-January.

In mid-April the adult birds commence their Pacific migration leaving the young behind. Hunger begins to bring the chicks from the nest at night, until they eventually set off after the adults. Somehow they find the migratory route without the guidance of the older birds. Source: <http://www.port-fairy.com/shearwaters.htm>

The Shearwater

The Shirt-Tailed Shearwater, a type of Mutton Bird, also called yula or moon bird, are harvested for food (the meat tastes like mutton), feathers for mattress fill, and the omega-3 rich oil, which is squeezed out of the birds' guts, for medicinal use. Harvesting is a confronting job to outsiders: birds are pulled from their burrows and their necks

are quickly snapped. There is a Dreamtime story that mutton birds come from the moon, hence Aboriginal birders are sometimes dubbed the moon bird people. Less romantically, the birds, blinded by light, have a habit of flying into the plucking sheds at night.

Mutton birding became the commercial mainstay of the islands by the mid-19th century after European sealers hunted seal colonies to near-extinction. Tasmania and the surrounding islands attract some 18 million birds every year. The chicks are “taken under strict controls”, says Tasmania’s Department of Primary Industries, Parks Water and Environment, although a poor breeding season a couple of years ago raised concerns about their survival.

The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre’s 2014-15 monitoring report indicates that bird occupancy rates at burrows at Big Dog and Babel have improved, although animal rights groups want an end to recreational killing, mostly distinguishing hunting by non-Aboriginal people from that by Aboriginal people with a cultural connection to the land.

That cultural connection ensures care is taken to maintain the mutton bird population, and the habitat is kept in balance so that the birds come back. “We play a part in making sure everything else around them is sustainable, too,” says Maynard.

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/dec/14/i-wanted-something-to-celebrate-indigenous-playwright-tackles-tradition-in-the-season>

“A thousand generations ago, the birds carried us here with them from the moon and they have been looking after us ever since. Like you fellas, I’m forever grateful...”
(Marlene, *The Season*)

Further Reading:

The following articles offer a range of views and information about mutton birding

1. <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2008/07/08/2298024.htm>
2. <http://www.muttonbird.net.au/>
3. <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/stage/muttonbirding-an-unbroken-connection-with-the-birds-and-islands/news-story/35b08b0f4c01296205fa3102989b6482>
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2016/dec/14/i-wanted-something-to-celebrate-indigenous-playwright-tackles-tradition-in-the-season>
5. <http://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2015-05-26/tasmanian-mutton-bird-harvest-keeps-aboriginal-culture-alive/6495256>
6. http://www.ecosmagazine.com/?act=view_file&file_id=EC123p34.pdf



Research (Critical & Creative Thinking, Environmental Science)

DISCUSS the differences between threatened, vulnerable, endangered and extinct animals.

Work in pairs and conduct some further research with regard to the mutton bird/shear water

Consider one of the following topics; *the migration of the Mutton Bird/Shearwater*, *the relationship between indigenous people and the mutton bird/shear water*, *early white settler harvesting of mutton birds/shear waters*, *maintaining sustainable bird populations*

Prepare a report for the class that creatively presents the information you discover
Consider how could you use digital technologies to do this? Images, vision, Prezi, sound etc.

Sustainability

In ecology, sustainability is the capacity to endure; it is how biological systems remain diverse and productive indefinitely. Long-lived and healthy wetlands and forests are examples of sustainable biological systems. Sustainability addresses the ongoing capacity of Earth to maintain all life. Sustainable patterns of living meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Actions to improve sustainability are individual and collective endeavours shared across local and global communities. They necessitate a renewed and balanced approach to the way humans interact with each other and the environment.

Source:

<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/crosscurriculumpriorities/sustainability/overview>



Consider (Intercultural Understanding, Environmental Science)

How many Earths?

Go to this link and enter the required details to determine your environmental footprint

http://www.wwf.org.au/our_work/people_and_the_environment/human_footprint/footprint_calculator/

What comment do you think the play might be making about our human relationship to the environment?

The Colonising Of Tasmania (Australian History)

In his Director's Notes, Isaac Drandic talks about Trukanini, incorrectly reported to be the last remaining Tasmanian Aboriginal woman before her death in 1876. He realises that she was not the last remaining Tasmanian Aboriginal person, and that his work on *The Season* enabled him to learn more about the history and continued survival of Tasmanian Aboriginal communities. Read the following extract from an article by Robert Paddle, Tasmania Museum and Art Gallery.

A Story From The Past: The Impact Of Colonisation

Mathinna was a Tasmanian Aboriginal child born in 1835 and taken from her family at age five by the Governor of Tasmania, John Franklin, and his wife Jane. It is said Mathinna arrived at Government House with a kangaroo skin, a rush basket, some shell necklaces and a pet possum. When the Franklins returned to England in 1843 they left her behind, and in the following years Mathinna struggled to find a sense of belonging in either black or white society. She died at age 17 as a result of alcohol abuse not long after the watershed events of the abolition of transportation, the granting of self-government and the official renaming to Tasmania – from "Precious Little Remains", Robert Paddle.

Source: http://www.tmag.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/80758/Teachers_guide.pdf



Discuss (Australian History, Ethics)

After reading the above extract by author Robert Paddle consider:

What issues are raised about the attitudes of the British in their colonising of Australia?

What 'values' are suggested as being present at the time (late 18th to late 19th Centuries)?

Why would one race/culture be considered superior to another?

Has our thinking changed? How will our thinking continue to change? Why?

Relationship To Country

Country is a place that gives and receives life. Not just imagined or represented it is lived in and lived with. Country in Aboriginal English is not only a common noun but also a proper noun. People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, and long for country – Deborah Rose, Nourishing Terrains.

Land means different things to non-indigenous and Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people have a spiritual, physical, social and cultural connection. Land management and care are vital for Aboriginal health and provide employment. Many Aboriginal artworks tell about connection between people and their land – Creative Spirits

Trying to frame this concept in modern language, is like trying to grasp a two dimensional cup out of a piece of paper, it's the layers that make the cup palpable, not the drawing of it. Connection to country is inherent, we are born to it, it is how we identify ourselves, it is our family, our laws, our responsibility, our inheritance and our legacy.

Source: <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2015/10/22/why-connection-country-so-important-aboriginal-communities>



Research & Discuss (Intercultural Understanding)

Explore The Following Links:

<http://splash.abc.net.au/home#!/media/525907/indigenous-perspective-on-sustainability>

<http://splash.abc.net.au/home#!/media/153584/aunty-ida-west-tasmanian-aboriginal-elder-1995>

<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/aiatsis-map-indigenous-australia>

Intercultural understanding stimulates [our] interest in the lives of others. It cultivates values and dispositions such as curiosity, care, empathy, reciprocity, respect and responsibility, open-mindedness and critical awareness, and supports new and positive intercultural behaviours. Though all are significant in learning to live together, three dispositions – expressing empathy, demonstrating respect and taking responsibility – have been identified as critical to the development of Intercultural Understanding (The Australian Curriculum)

DISCUSS:

How does this last section contribute to your understanding of the past and contemporary lives of Tasmanian Aboriginal peoples?

What do you think *The Season* offers in terms of teaching you or affirming your understanding?

Is intercultural understanding important? Discuss this in pairs and then as a whole group considering your understanding of the term ie. What does it mean to you?

What is your understanding of country and connection to country? Do you feel similarly to some of the written statements above?



'Cultural Jewels'

Stella, Marlene and Lou are shelling necklaces

Lou: *Mum, gave me the shells.*

Marlene: *She did what? Lucky I was sitting down when I heard that.*

Ritchie: *While since you strung shells.*

Lou: *Not for a long time, aye.*

Marlene: *It's good to see her practicing culture. You should have more of a go, Ritchie*

Ritchie: *What shell-stringing? That's women's business*

DISCUSS - The quotation above contains a great deal of information in just six lines. Discuss the conversation and what discoveries you make. Why does Ritchie say that shell stringing is 'women's business'? Now, watch the short video at the link: <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/kanalaritja>



Research & Discuss (Critical & Creative Thinking, Intercultural Understanding, History)

Shell collecting and shell stringing is a traditional practice as the scene from the play indicates.

What discoveries did you make about the tradition of shell stringing?

What are 'cultural jewels'?

What other research can you conduct to find out more?

After conducting your research, what new significance does the above short scene from the play have?

Revisit this section and the text after seeing the scene performed in the play.



After Seeing The Production



Post Show Questions (Drama, Critical Thinking)

Use the following questions as prompts to explore the play in performance. Find a way to record responses through writing or online or other digital mode.

As you work through the questions keep considering – *what makes you think or say that, what did you see, hear and/or feel* – in order to provoke reasons for your response.

- What do you remember about the theatre that you saw the play in?
- Discuss how different theatres and where you sit in a theatre might give you a - different experience.
- What type of world did the characters in the play inhabit – how would you describe it?
- What did you know about the history of the mutton birding and its traditions before you saw the show?
- In pairs make some dot points about the main story or stories in the play – where did it begin and where did it end?
- Did you predict what was going to happen in the end?
- What did you notice about the costumes? Make-up?
- How did one actor create two different roles?
- Did the types of costumes worn impact on your understanding of what was happening?
- How many different places and locations did the story take you to?
- How were these places created on stage? What stagecraft elements enabled this?
- How did you feel about the characters? Which ones did you respond to most strongly?
- Was the play funny at certain times? If so what aspects made it comic?
- How dominant were mutton birds in the stories? Did you feel they were important? Did they take on different importance to different characters? Why?
- Did you feel you were asked to take sides in this play? Which side did you take?
- How important was the audience to the performance? Did you feel you had a role to play?
- What impressions did you gain of the stagecraft elements of – set, props, lighting, sound, costume?
- What was your overall feeling and opinion of the production?
- If you could ask a question of the creative team what would it be?
- How would you describe the play to a friend, a parent, a stranger?



Stagecraft in *The Season*

Earlier in this resource you were asked to consider stagecraft and design in the theatre. Using the production images provided here reflect on how lighting, set, costume and direction were used in the play.

- Select one image
- Can you recall that moment in the play?
- Who are the characters?
- Where is the scene located?
- Describe the emotion or feeling of the scene. How is this achieved – consider direction and acting, focus, tension, timing, mood etc.
- How would you describe the lighting state – day/night, warm/cold, open/focused?
- What SOUND can you recall hearing throughout the performance?

All images by Robert Catto

Image 1:



Image 2:



Image 3:



Image 4:



Image 5:





Language And Writing (English)

The following extracts from the play are provided as a way of exploring the performance more closely through language, writing and themes.

Stella: Benjamin Tasman Duncan. I've been looking for you. We done 500 birds yesterday...What's wrong? Ben? Ben?

Ben: *(He breaks down crying)* Henrietta didn't come back...she didn't come back.
(Stella cuddles him and he begins to cry)

Ben: Just one more season. Just one more.

Stella: She hasn't got one more in her.

- Who/what is Henrietta?
- Why didn't she come back?
- Why is Ben so deeply upset about this?

Ritchie to Neil:

If you run into the old sealer, kidnapping the boy...You don't wanna be walking around here in the dark, you might run into one of those Fellas, you know, one that-can't-leave-the-island-like. *(Body language says ghosts and making a ghost noise)*...Just warning you. He's a territorial old bastard; ya don't wanna get in his way. Every night, on the half-moon, he walks down here, dragging the boy back to his boat...Half-moon coming up in a couple of weeks, aye...Yep. They say, when he got the boy back to the boat, the boy grabbed the sealer's gun from his jacket pocket and BANG! Shot him in the head...[the boy] got shot by one of the other sealers on the boat and ever since...Every half-moon, two of them relieve the moments before their deaths. The boy trying to get away and the sealer trying not get shot.

- What do you remember about this scene in the play?
- Discuss how the story was re-enacted at another point in the play – what do you recall?
- How and why do such 'ghostly' stories arise?
- Do you believe in such stories and why?
- What other legends or ghostly stories do you recall?

Clay: Maddie seen dad on Flinders yesterday...He's definitely coming over this arvo...and then later tonight, we're gunna go sharking, that's why I'm draining the blood out of the gut bin (he lifts the red jar up to show his nan). There's not time like the present, live every day to the fullest, and all that jazz.

Stella: You are home, ain't ya matey? But do me a favour; in the future don't let your dad be the thing that determines if you're happy or not.

- Why is Clay so excited about his dad coming over to visit?
- What happens to Clay's dad?
- Why does Stella say these words to Clay?
- How does this scene comment on who we are?

Stella: She could only hope as she watched them leave the island and make their way to the sea

Ben: That all they had taught them was enough.

Marlene: They had to fly their own path now, and weather their own storms,

Ritchie: Find their life mate and one day, scratch out their own burrows.

Lou: Some of the old birds, wouldn't make it back the next season.

Clay: But the youngest birds, would always carry the story on.

- How does the language in this scene differ from the language used more broadly in the play?
- Discuss why the playwright has chosen to change the language.
- What images are conjured by these words?
- Discuss how these final words may contribute to your understanding of Indigenous people's connection to country.

Ben: But what if you lose your pilot bird? Then how do you find your way? How do you keep flying if you lose a wing?

- Discuss what Ben means by this series of questions
- How might it be a metaphor for him and his family?
- What is the significance of the annual birding to the Duncan's?



Poetry – Haiku (English, Literacy)

Drifting on the winds	Island calls to me	Family of mine
Winging its way home to mate	I answer its rhythm and	We are one but one together
Cycle of its life	Let it bring me home	Coming home once more

Haiku:

A Japanese poem using three lines of verse.

The first and third lines have five syllables and the middle line has seven.

It seeks to capture the essence of an idea, a moment, or an image.

RESPONDING TO THE PLAY THROUGH HAIKU

- Consider what you have read, researched, discussed and explored about the play. Consider the performance itself.
- Select an idea or theme, a moment, a character, a perspective, a place or even choose the experience of seeing the play itself
- Write a Haiku that captures that moment or idea in as compelling way as possible
- Share the Haikus, collate the Haikus, publish the Haikus.
- Consider similarities, differences, surprises and discoveries about writing, about ideas and about theatre.
- In what way does the writing of the Haiku enhance your understanding of the play and the issues it raises?



Reviewing The Reviewers (Drama, English, Literacy)

Read the following four extracts from reviews of *The Season*. You can follow the links to read the entire review if you wish. Note how each extract discusses one or more of acting, directing, design (set, lighting, costume), theatrical style, narrative.

1. The Duncans, too, are now dispersed, living in different places. Yet they return to Dog Island – with its sweeping sands and roaring sea – to reconnect with mob and with country. The set designer Richard Roberts conveys both this sense of home and of expanse, combining a cramped, low-key kitchen in one corner with the vast wilds of the beach. The birds, meanwhile, slung over the backs of the harvesters on wooden poles, are depicted through white rags.

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2017/jan/13/the-season-review-family-comedy-gives-wing-to-some-spirited-performances>

2. She (Lou) also has a terrific scene with Slee – whose teenager possesses a compelling blend of vulnerability, physical awkwardness, and naive optimism – where a safe-sex talk between mother and son opens an abyss of adolescent excruciation and embarrassment. Such perfectly observed comic moments are woven continually into the domestic carpet. And Trevor Jamieson juggles two kinds of clowning as two different outsiders to the family.

Director Isaac Drandic, “should be commended for tuning performances that strike a balance between free-wheeling comedy and understated emotion. The cast gives Maynard’s sharp typologies a fully inhabited feel, and you’ll fall in love with the characters – an Indigenous family powerfully shaped, but not defined, by heritage and culture.

Source: <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/theatre/the-season-review-cast-brings-comic-brilliance-to-heartwarming-comedy-20171013-gz0m60.html>

3. Working together with lighting designer, Rachel Burke, Roberts has captured the wild personality of Dog Island. The action takes place on primarily on a centrally set canvas slope, a simulation of the sand-dunes where the mutton birds make their homes. Hanging above the slope is a grey flat onto which are projected ghostly clouds and an array of light dots that can be interpreted many ways, perhaps as a sky full of stars, a painting in the traditional Aboriginal style, or even a reflection of the birds in their burrows below. In the negative space between these two lines is the ‘shed’, a place for deeper, darker thoughts. Finally, a small kitchen has been established downstage right; a place to reset each day.

Source: <http://arts.theaureview.com/reviews/sydney-festival-review-the-season-is-a-terrific-yarn-until-15-january/>

4. There are, strategically, no walls on Richard Roberts’ minimalist and highly stylised stage at the Drama Theatre. Indoors spills into outdoors and the closer you sit, the

more you are able to appreciate the physical demands of the steeply raked stage. It conjures a peaceful sense of the island and of a tradition as old and ingrained in Tasmanian life and culture as the Aboriginal people, and we instantly understand that our family, the Duncans, are very much at one with the land.

The cast is extraordinarily hard-working throughout this one act play, both physically (running up hill, waving hefty hessian bags) and emotionally. Each offer truthful and honest performances and come together to form a highly realistic and familiar family.

Source: <https://aussietheatre.com.au/reviews/season-sydney-festival>



What is the purpose of a theatre review?

UK Guardian reviewer and critic, Lyn Gardner, is a veteran at writing for the theatre. She offers some advice here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2012/oct/04/theatre-criticism-cat-hot-tin-roof>.

However, if you are studying Drama/Theatre the curriculum may dictate how you are to write and what you are to write. Describe, analyse, evaluate, discuss, compare, contrast are often terms you encounter in a writing task about performance/theatre analysis.

Revisit the review extracts above and select one of the extracts

- Examine closely what aspects of the production it is commenting on
- Underline what you believe to be key words
- What information and evaluation is contained in the extracts above?
- What do you learn about the play?
- What areas of the production are discussed?
- Does the writer adopt a positive/negative/analytical/critical tone?
- Do you agree/disagree with the reviewer with regard to their comments/analysis?
- Justify your response to the review – does it match your experience of the play?
- What would you write if you were reviewing that particular aspect of the play?
- Consider if a review can have an emotional response or a personal response.
- What emotional or personal responses did you have to aspects of the performance?



Creating The Moon Bird (Drama)

In this activity you will work in a small group to create a version of the mutton bird or moon bird in flight using non-realistic theatre form.

Before you begin, discuss how the play, the resource and your research has given you a sense of the mutton bird, its life, its migration, its physical qualities, its behavior, and its value to the Indigenous people of Tasmania and the Bass Strait Islands.

In your creative representation, you are encouraged to consider movement, mime, physical theatre, ensemble work and the integration of space, levels, time and music.

- Begin with the activity known as **flocking** where groups of four to five stand in a diamond shape with a clear leader who initiates movement – like a bird at the front of a flock of other birds.
- Here are two links that may be helpful in terms of demonstration. The group do not need to have physical contact:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MKF2apnqH5g> and
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PoleUlr9H_M
- You may wish to incorporate some of these elements into your work.
- MUSIC – as a group select a piece of music that you agree underscores/enhances your movement piece in terms of quality, mood and atmosphere.
- Allow time to create, rehearse, refine and edit your work
- Present these to the rest of the group when they are ready
- Reflect on the process of creating the bird and also reflect on other groups' choices
- How did it feel to create the bird?
- What were the challenges it offered?



Creating A Short Monologue (Drama, English/Literacy)

This activity can be a creative writing activity OR it can become a scripted, performance based activity.

- Imagine it is 24 hours after the end of the mutton birding season and everyone has left the island
- Select one of the characters from the play and create a detailed character analysis – name, age, relationship to others, likes, dislikes, motivations, fears, habits, status, how they are described in the play, how others talk about them etc.

- Endeavouring to stay truthful to that character, write a short monologue (1-2 minutes) that explores that character's thoughts about the season that has just gone.
- For example - what was new, what did they discover, what was important, what was surprising, what was difficult, what was disappointing, what would they change, what was wonderful, what would they change?
- The monologue may take the form of a letter to one of the other characters
- This means you could pair up and co-create the response to each other
- For example, Clay writing to his grandmother, Lou writing to her father, Marlene writing to Stella.
- If you are simply writing it then, when it is complete, read it to the other character
- If you are performing it for Drama, learn the lines and using expressive skills such as voice, movement, gesture, focus and the dramatic elements of mood, time, focus, space present your monologue
- EXTENSION: consider how you can intersperse the two monologues/letters by breaking up the text so that the audience hears both monologues but in parts or pieces.
- How might this impact the audience response? How might this impact each character? How might it impact the writing?



Creating A Devised Performance (Drama)

In the activity you will work in small groups of 3 – 5 to create an ENSEMBLE devised performance that responds to one of the following stimuli as a prompt.

Stimulus 1

SONG:

*I was born on old Cape Barren
In them blue hills over there
I was just a little baby
When my dear old mumma died.*

*It's been years since we parted
And the time is drawing nearer
I will meet my dear old mumma
In the blue hills over there...*

*I was born on ole Cape Barren
In them Blue Hills over there
Just remember what I told you
About them blue hills over there.*

Stimulus 2

*"When the moon fell away from the face of earth
it left the moonbird behind
I want to sing the song of the moonbird to you
So your family will sing you back home....."*

[Extract from Songlines of the Moon Bird Learning Resource]

Stimulus 3

Country is a place that gives and receives life. Not just imagined or represented it is lived in and lived with. Country in Aboriginal English is not only a common noun but also a proper noun. People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, and long for country – Deborah Rose, Nourishing Terrains.

BRAINSTORM:

- In your group select one of the stimuli and brainstorm some ideas
- These could include images, key words, characters, story line
- It may be useful to consider 'given circumstances' – who, where, what, why, when, how
- Don't limit your brainstorming – include every idea at this stage.

THEATRICAL STYLES:

- Consider drawing on aspects of - non-naturalism/non-realism, Brecht's Epic Theatre, Physical Theatre, Verbatim Theatre, Theatre of Cruelty, Story-telling, Realism
- You may need to do some research with regard to the conventions of some of these styles. Here is a link:
<http://www.thedramateacher.com/category/genres-and-styles>
- How might the conventions of certain theatre styles be helpful to the ideas you have already brainstormed, conventions that might assist in conveying a story, a meaning, an interpretation?

STRUCTURING THE ENSEMBLE:

Here are some suggestions:

- Select up to four key points or scenes.
- You could story board these, write them onto large sheets of paper or have as a digital record and include the, who, where, when, what, how and why for each scene.
- Consider AUDIENCE and the PERFORMANCE SPACE you have available.

IMPROVISATION:

- As a group allocate any identified characters, but also consider several performers playing the same character or idea using non-naturalistic techniques to shift and change.
- See above for advice re theatrical styles
- You could begin by creating a tableau for each scene or image
- Improvise characters and find their qualities
- Improvise the key scenes using the entire ENSEMBLE
- Write some script
- Play with representation, chorus, freeze, disconnected voices, sound to find contrasts.
- Keep considering your audience, the story/ies you are telling and the impact you wish to have.

REHEARSE & REFINE:

- Rehearse your ensemble performance, invite some critical friends to give feedback, record and keep what is working, don't be afraid to let go of what is not.
- Refine your choices make final decisions about what will remain.
- Be culturally sensitive in your thinking – play the idea rather than the person if it helps.
- Rehearse again

PERFORM:

- At its most simple, the work can be performed in a drama class or to another class.
- At its more ambitious, it could be part of a drama or theatre festival that explores issues about Australia and how we will approach our future.

REFLECT:

- Reflect on the work, both the process and the performance.
- Consider how you made the work, how others made theirs, what you might change if you had more time, the different experiences of being audience and performer.



Finally

Theatre and film actor Willem Dafoe, states:

“Great theatre is about challenging how we think and encouraging us to fantasize about a world we aspire to”.

Do you agree?

Have your thoughts changed about the world?

What from the performance and the activities in the resource may have prompted that?

Does your own creative work seek to challenge and inspire?

Did seeing *The Season* have an impact on your thinking about connection to country, family, Indigenous history or any other issues and themes?

Did it impact the way you think about and your own creative work?

The following documents are referenced in this resource.

- *Songlines of the Moonbird* Learning Resource, Aboriginal Education, Department of Education Tasmania
- Teachers’ Guide – *Big Dog Connection*, Australian Government, Department of Education Science & Training
- *Cultural Jewels* – Tasmanian Aboriginal Shell Collecting and Stringing, developed by Aboriginal Education Services Cultural Program: Connecting Community, Culture and Country. Project Coordinator, Teresa Sainty 2010
- *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness* by Deborah Rose, ANU, Canberra Australia ISBN: 0642235619

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM		
Discipline	Organising Strands	Sub-strands / descriptors
English	<p><i>Language</i>: knowing about the English language</p> <p><i>Literature</i>: understanding, appreciating, responding to, analysing and creating literature</p> <p><i>Literacy</i>: expanding the repertoire of English usage.</p>	<p>Language variation and change</p> <p>Language for interaction</p> <p>Expressing and developing ideas</p> <p>Literature and context</p> <p>Responding to literature</p> <p>Examining literature</p> <p>Creating literature</p> <p>Interacting with others</p> <p>Interpreting, analysing and evaluating</p> <p>Creating Texts</p>
History	<i>Australia and Asia</i>	<p>Who we are, who came before us, and traditions and values that have shaped societies.</p> <p>How societies and economies operate and how they change over time.</p> <p>The people, places, ideas and events are perceived and connected.</p> <p>How people exercise their responsibilities, participate in society and make informed decisions.</p>
The Arts: Drama	<p><i>Making</i></p> <p><i>Responding</i></p>	<p>Improvising, devising, playing, acting, directing, refining, interpreting, rehearsing, presenting, performing</p> <p>Being an audience, listening to, enjoying, reflecting, analysing, appreciating and evaluating own and others' drama work</p>

AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM	
General Capability	Organising Elements
Intercultural Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognising culture and developing respect • Interacting and empathizing with others • Reflecting on intercultural experiences and taking responsibility
Ethical Understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding ethical concepts and issues • Reasoning in decision making and actions • Exploring values, rights and responsibilities
Critical and Creating Thinking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquiring – identifying, exploring and organising information and ideas • Generating ideas, possibilities and actions • Reflecting on thinking and processes • Analysing, synthesizing and evaluating reasoning and procedures
Cross Curriculum Priorities	Key Concepts
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Connection to Country/Place • Celebration of unique believe systems that connect people physically and spiritually to Country/Place • Diversity of culture through language, ways of life, and experiences as expressed through historical, social and political lenses • Kinship structures and significant contributions of ATSI people at local, national and global level.
Sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interdependent and dynamic nature of systems that support life on Earth • Promotion of patterns for living for our collective wellbeing and survival • Allowing for diversity of world views, ecosystems, values and social justice to be discussed and linked to individual and community action for sustainability • Building capacities for thinking and acting in ways that are necessary to create a sustainable future.

ABOUT THE WRITER:

Meg Upton is an arts educator, arts researcher, lecturer and writer. She teaches drama and theatre education at Deakin University. Since 2000 she has worked as an education manager and teaching artist with Malthouse Theatre and Melbourne Theatre Company. Other companies Meg has worked with include Arena Theatre Company, KAGE, Polyglot, Arts Centre Melbourne, Theatre Works, Platform Youth Arts, Ilbjerri Theatre Company and Victorian Opera. She has a PHD from the University of Melbourne that explores the pedagogies of teaching theatre performance analysis in senior drama. Meg has created nearly one hundred education resources in the past fifteen years for theatre and dance companies, touring companies, playwrights, ABC Splash, Education Services Australia and recently for the Australian Federal Police and Attorney General's Department. In the past years she has presented her research and practice at conferences in Paris, Singapore, New Zealand, New York, Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Hobart. Meg is a board member of Drama Victoria and RAWCUS (a theatre company for people with and without disabilities), and Vice President of the Victorian Green Room Association Awards.



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